

U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Consular Affairs
Washington, DC 20520

Consular Information Sheet

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Afghanistan

October 19, 2004

COUNTRY DESCRIPTION: Despite significant progress since the Taliban was deposed in 2001, Afghanistan still faces daunting challenges – recovering from over two decades of civil strife, dealing with years of severe drought, and rebuilding a shattered infrastructure. Meanwhile, Operation Enduring Freedom continues to combat remaining Taliban and al Qaida elements. The Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan assumed power following the Emergency Loya Jirga held in June 2002 and adopted a new Constitution in January 2004.

ENTRY/EXIT REQUIREMENTS: A passport and visa are required. Information on entry requirements may be obtained from the Embassy of Afghanistan located at 2341 Wyoming Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008, phone no. 202-483-6410, fax no. 202-483-6488, website: <http://www.embassyofAfghanistan.org>.

In an effort to prevent international child abduction, many governments have initiated procedures at entry/exit points. These often include requiring documentary evidence of relationship and permission for the child's travel from the parent(s) or legal guardian not present. Having such documentation on hand, even if not required, may facilitate entry/departure.

DUAL NATIONALITY: In addition to being subject to all Afghan laws affecting U.S. citizens, dual nationals may also be subject to other laws that impose special obligations on Afghan citizens. U.S. citizens who are also Afghan nationals do not require visas for entry into Afghanistan. The Embassy of Afghanistan issues a letter confirming your nationality for entry into Afghanistan. However, you may wish to obtain a visa as some Afghan-Americans have experienced difficulties at land border crossings because they do not have a visa in their passport. For additional information on dual nationality in general, see the Consular Affairs home page on the Internet at <http://travel.state.gov> for our [Dual Nationality flyer](#) .

SAFETY AND SECURITY: The latest Travel Warning for Afghanistan states clearly that the security situation remains critical for American citizens. There are remnants of the former Taliban regime and the terrorist al-Qaida network in various parts of Afghanistan, who want to drive all westerners out of Afghanistan and they do not hesitate to use violence to achieve their aims. There is a continuing threat of terrorist actions, including attacks using vehicles, rocket propelled grenades, improvised explosive devices and other forms of bombs. There is an ongoing threat to kidnap US citizens and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) workers throughout the country. The country faces a difficult period in the near term, and American citizens could be targeted or placed at risk by unpredictable local events. There is also a real danger from the presence of millions of unexploded land mines and other ordnance.

Afghan-Americans returning to Afghanistan to recover property have become involved in complicated disputes and have faced threats of retaliatory actions including kidnapping for ransom.

For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Internet web site at <http://travel.state.gov> where the current [Worldwide Caution Public Announcement](#) and other [Public Announcements, and Travel Warnings](#) , including the [Travel Warning for Afghanistan](#) , can be found.

Up to date information on security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the United States, or, for callers outside the United States and Canada, a regular toll line at 1-317-472-2328. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

CRIME : A large portion of the Afghan population is unemployed, and many among the unemployed have moved to urban areas. Basic services are rudimentary or non-existent. These factors may directly contribute to crime and lawlessness. Diplomats and international relief workers have reported incidents of robberies and household burglaries. Any American citizen who enters Afghanistan should remain vigilant for possible banditry, including violent attacks.

The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. The Embassy/Consulate staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, to contact family members or friends and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of a crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed.

U.S. citizens may refer to the Department of State's pamphlet, " [A Safe Trip Abroad](#) ," and " [Tips for](#)

[Travelers to South Asia](#) ” for ways to promote a trouble-free journey. The pamphlets are available by mail from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, via the Internet at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov> , or via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page at <http://travel.state.gov> .

MEDICAL FACILITIES: Well-equipped medical facilities are few and far between throughout Afghanistan. European and American medicines are generally available in limited quantities and may be expensive or difficult to locate. There is a shortage of basic medical supplies. Basic medicines manufactured in Iran, Pakistan and India are available, but their reliability can be questionable. American travelers may seek emergency medical services at the International Security Assistance Forces medical facilities in Kabul, but routine care is not available. The Malteser Clinic, located behind the Police Academy in Kabul, is staffed by German contract medical personnel and provides Western-standard routine medical care. Afghan hospitals in Kabul should be avoided at this time. Travelers will not be able to find Western-trained medical personnel in most parts of the country outside of Kabul, although there are some international aid groups temporarily providing basic medical assistance in various cities and villages. For any medical treatment, payment is required in advance. Commercial medical evacuation capability from Afghanistan is limited.

MEDICAL INSURANCE: The Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. U.S. medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Further, U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States. However, many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans that will cover health care expenses incurred overseas including emergency services such as medical evacuations. Medical transfer out of Afghanistan can be very difficult to accomplish and expensive.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the U.S. may cost in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses you incur. Some insurance policies also include coverage for psychiatric treatment and for disposition of remains in the event of death.

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is provided in the Department of State’s Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, “ [Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad](#) ,” available via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page.

OTHER HEALTH INFORMATION: Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or via the CDC’s Internet site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel> . For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad consult the World Health Organization’s website at <http://www.who.int/en> . Further health information for travelers is available

at <http://www.who.int/ith> .

TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS: While in a foreign country, U.S. citizens may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The information below concerning Afghanistan is provided for general reference only, and may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance.

Safety of Public Transportation: Poor

Urban Road Conditions/Maintenance: Poor

Rural Road Conditions/Maintenance: Poor

Availability of Roadside Assistance: Poor

All traffic is in danger of land mines that may have been planted on or near roadways. An estimated 5-7 million landmines and large quantities of unexploded ordnance exist throughout the countryside and alongside roads, posing a danger to travelers. Robbery and crime are also prevalent on highways outside of Kabul. The transportation system in Afghanistan is marginal, although modern highways and provincial roads are being constructed by the international community. Vehicles are poorly maintained, often overloaded and traffic laws are not enforced. Vehicular traffic is chaotic and must contend with numerous pedestrians, bicyclists and animals. Many urban streets have large potholes and are not well lit. Rural roads are not paved.

For additional general information about road safety, including links to foreign government sites, see the Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs home page at http://travel.state.gov/travel/abroad_roadsafety.html .

AVIATION SAFETY OVERSIGHT: As there is currently no direct commercial air service between the U.S. and Afghanistan, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not formally assessed Afghanistan 's Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with international aviation safety standards.

Three commercial airlines serve Afghanistan out of Kabul International Airport. Pakistan International Airlines has three weekly flights to and from Islamabad. Azerbaijan Airways has three weekly flights to and from Baku. The U.S. Embassy in Kabul strongly recommends against flying the third carrier operating out of Kabul, Ariana Afghan Airlines.

In January 2004, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reviewed an aviation safety assessment report prepared by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which outlined significant safety deficiencies with Ariana Afghan Airlines. The FAA's review of the ICAO findings and interviews with Ariana Afghan Airlines officials identified significant safety deficiencies. Due to these findings, the U.S. government does not authorize official personnel to fly Ariana Afghan Airlines.

For further information, travelers may contact the Department of Transportation within the U.S. at 1-800-322-7873, or visit the FAA's Internet website at <http://www.faa.gov/avr/iasa/index.cfm> .

CUSTOMS REGULATIONS: Afghan customs authorities may enforce strict regulations concerning temporary importation into or export from Afghanistan of items such as firearms, alcoholic beverages, religious materials, antiquities, medications, and printed materials. It is advisable to contact the Embassy of Afghanistan in Washington for specific information regarding customs

requirements. Travelers enroute to Afghanistan may transit countries that have restrictions on firearms, including antique or display models. If you plan to take your firearms or ammunition to another country, you should contact officials at that country's embassy and those that you will be transiting to learn about their regulations and fully comply with those regulations before traveling. Please consult <http://www.customs.gov> for information on importing firearms into the United States.

In many countries around the world, counterfeit and pirated goods are widely available. Transactions involving such products are illegal and bringing them back to the United States may result in forfeitures and/or fines. A current list of those countries with serious problems in this regard can be found [here](#).

CRIMINAL PENALTIES: While in a foreign country, a U.S. citizen is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the United States and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses. Persons violating Afghanistan's laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Afghanistan are strict and convicted offenders can expect jail sentences and heavy fines. Another potentially sensitive activity is proselytizing. Although the new Afghan Constitution allows the free exercise of religions, proselytizing may be viewed as contrary to the beliefs of Islam and may be considered a harmful activity.

Under the PROTECT Act of April 2003, it is a crime, prosecutable in the United States, for a U.S. citizen or permanent resident alien, to engage in illicit sexual conduct in a foreign country with a person under the age of 18, whether or not the U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident alien intended to engage in such illicit sexual conduct prior to going abroad. For purposes of the PROTECT Act, illicit sexual conduct includes any commercial sex act in a foreign country with a person under the age of 18. The law defines a commercial sex act as any sex act, on account of which anything of value is given to or received by a person under the age of 18.

Under the Protection of Children from Sexual Predators Act of 1998, it is a crime to use the mail or any facility of interstate or foreign commerce, including the Internet, to transmit information about a minor under the age of 16 for criminal sexual purposes that include, among other things, the production of child pornography. This same law makes it a crime to use any facility of interstate or foreign commerce, including the Internet, to transport obscene materials to minors under the age of 16.

CONSULAR ACCESS: U.S. citizens are encouraged to carry a copy of their U.S. passport with them at all times, so that, if questioned by local officials, proof of identity and U.S. citizenship are readily available. As stated in the Travel Warning, consular assistance for American citizens in Afghanistan is limited.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES: Because of the poor infrastructure in Afghanistan, access to banking facilities is extremely limited and unreliable. Afghanistan's economy operates on a "cash-only" basis for most transactions. Credit card transactions are not available. International bank transfers are very limited, as the banking system is just becoming operational. No ATM machines exist.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS : International communications are difficult. Local telephone networks do not operate reliably. Most people rely on satellite or cellular telephone communications even to

make local calls. Cellular phone service is available locally in Kabul and some other cities. Injured or distressed foreigners could face long delays before being able to communicate their needs to family or colleagues outside of Afghanistan. Internet access through local service providers is limited.

CHILDREN'S ISSUES: Afghan law does not allow for adoption of children by foreigners. For information on international adoption of children and international parental child abduction, please refer to our Internet site at <http://travel.state.gov/family/index.html> or telephone Overseas Citizens Services at 1-888-407-4747. This number is available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays). Callers who are unable to use toll-free numbers, such as those calling from overseas, may obtain information and assistance during these hours by calling 1-317-472-2328.

REGISTRATION/EMBASSY LOCATION: U.S. citizens living or traveling in Afghanistan are encouraged to register with the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul through the State Department's travel registration website, <https://travelregistration.state.gov>, and to obtain updated information on travel and security within Afghanistan. U.S. citizens may also register with the consular section online by visiting the Embassy's web site at <http://usembassy.state.gov/afghanistan/>. Americans without internet access may register in person at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. By registering, American citizens make it easier for the Embassy to contact them in case of emergency. The Embassy provides no visa services, but does perform emergency and routine passport and citizens services. The U.S. Embassy is located at Great Masood Road, also known as Bebe Mahro (Airport) Road, Kabul, telephone number: 93-20-230-0436. Fax number (93-20) 230-1364.

This replaces the Consular Information Sheet for Afghanistan dated January 21, 2004, to update information on Country Description, Safety and Security, Crime, Medical Facilities, Traffic Safety and Road Conditions, Aviation Safety Oversight, Customs Regulations, Criminal Penalties, Children's Issues, and Registration/Embassy Location.

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